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SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE ATTITUDE OF THE SYNAGOGUE TOWARDS THE APOCALYPTIC-ESCHATOLOGICAL WRITINGS

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THE attractiveness of the novel is responsible not only for the lively interest in the Apocalyptic-eschatological literature noticeable among all students of the origins of Christianity, but also for the exaggerated claims advanced by some scholars for these literary productions of a handful of Jewish visionaries. Many an apocalypse has been discovered or made accessible only in recent times and scholars are human enough to be dazzled by sudden light. A picture drawn by artificial light will never be true to nature, great as the skill of the artist may be, and hence the failure of some really great scholars to give us a true picture of the religious life of Israel at the time of the rise of Christianity. A history of Judaism based on the Pseudepigrapha and particularly the visions of the apocalypses could but be a visionary pseudo-history. It would, however, be impossible within the compass of anything less than a substantial volume to present an adequate criticism of the view which sees in the so-called popular literature of the Jews the true mirror of the religion of the Jewish people. In the following few remarks I intend to give some facts about the attitude of the Synagogue towards the apocalyptic writings which I hope may throw some light on the very intricate problems connected with the eschatological doctrines and beliefs of the Jews at the time of the Apostles and Apostolic Fathers.

It is a well-known fact that none of the apocalyptic books with the exception of Daniel was received by the Synagogue.¹ The preservation of this literature is exclusively due to the efforts of the early Church. With equal certainty one may state that there is not one quotation from the now extant apocalyptic writings in the vast Rabbinic literature extending over the first six centuries of the common era. One might cite numerous parallels to the statements, legends or phrases of the apocalyptic authors from the Rabbinic writings, but these parallels are never of a nature that would indicate a literary dependence of the one kind of literature upon the other. This is best proved by the fact that the Rabbis never mention by name any apocalyptic writing. It is true Dr. Kohler (*J. Q. R. V.*, pp. 400—401) finds in an ancient Tannaitic tradition a direct reference to the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Not having however the vision of an apocalyptic writer I fail to detect in the passages indicated by Dr. Kohler the slightest reference to the Testaments. The assertion of Dr. Kohler is based on an arbitrarily construed text and on the impossible translation thereof. He quotes from the Talmud the text dealing with the nature of the admonition addressed by the court to the woman suspected of adultery; the text as given by Dr. Kohler reads:

**דברי הגדה מעשים שאירעו בכתובים הראשונים
כגון מעשה ראובן בבלהה ומעשה יהודה בתמר אשר חכמים יגידו
אלו ראובן ויהודה**

The translation of this text by Dr. Kohler is: Words of the Haggadah, historical facts which occur in the early writings as the story of Reuben regarding Bilhah and of Judah regarding Tamar, as it says in Job XV. 18 "The wise ones confess and conceal it not; these are Reuben and Judah." The early writings, according to Dr. Kohler, are the Testaments where the confessions of Reuben and Judah are found. We thus learn from this tradition of the Tannaim the very interesting fact that one of the apocalypses at least, for some time, enjoyed almost canonical dignity among the Rabbis. Before giving the true text

¹ The apocalyptic literature of the Gaonic period is neither in form nor in matter a direct development of the pre-Talmudic Apocalypse.

as found in the Rabbinic sources I want to call attention to the very strange translation² by Dr. Kohler of the imaginary one. Misled by the English expression "occur in a book" he renders **שֶׁאִירְעוּ בַּכְּתוּבִים** by "which occur in the writings". But **אָרַע ב'** has never any other meaning than "it happened to"—generally something evil or unpleasant³—and accordingly our text would speak of something that happened to the ancient writings!

Dr. Kohler, though giving three sources for the text quoted did not state that in none of them "his" text is found.⁴ Sifre, Numbers 12 has not the sentence from **מַעֲשֵׂה** to **בַּתְּמַר**; after **כְּנֹן** follows the quotation from Job;⁵ in Babli, Sotah 7b where this sentence is found it follows after the quotation from Job, while in Yerushalmi, Sotah I, 16b the text begins with **כְּנֹן** as a comment upon the words of the Mishna I, 4 and hence may entirely be ignored in the discussion of the meaning of **כְּתוּבִים הָרִאשִׁים** found in the two other sources. The text as given in Sifre and Babli admits two explanations. **דְּבָרֵי הַגָּדָה וּמַעֲשִׂים** may be taken as *ἐν τῇ δὲ ἱστορίᾳ*, the Haggadah concerning the events that happened and **כְּתוּבִים הָרִאשֹׁנִים** stands for Job which, according to the Rabbis, is the third⁶ in the order of the eleven Hagiographa. The passage is consequently to be rendered: "The

² Dr. Charles, who, in the introduction to his translations of the Testaments, quotes Dr. Kohler's view with approval very likely did not take the trouble to look up the passages quoted by him.

³ The "happenings" consequently refer to the sins and not the confessions; why then quote the Testaments and not Genesis?

⁴ The text given by Dr. Kohler is that emended by Guedemann, *Zunz — Jubelschrift*, 116, in accordance with his view that Haggadah means "story". Bacher, *Tannaiten*, II. 451, has disposed of the "story" and also of the emendation.

⁵ In Sifre **מַעֲשִׂים** without **דְּבָרֵי**, which is probably due to some "learned" copyist who omitted this letter on account of his inability to explain the construction of the sentence. The reading with **דְּבָרֵי** as given in the editions of Babli is found also in Rashi, *ad loc.*, Yalkut, I, 707, on Num. 5:15 (in the first edition: **בַּכְּתוּבִים** comp. note 10), Ibn Masnut in his commentary on Job 15:18 and in the Munich Ms. of the Talmud.

⁶ According to the Massorah the three first Hagiographa are "Psalms, Proverbs and Job", while the Tannaitic tradition in Baba Batra, 14b, gives the order as, "Ruth, Psalms and Job". Comp. also Berakot, 57b, beginning, "The three big Hagiographa—Psalms, Proverbs and Job".

Haggadah found in the first Hagiographa concerning the events that happened, for example: which wise men have told etc." The verse of Job is quite correctly described as a Haggadah on the narratives of Genesis about the sins of Reuben and Judah. The other explanation presupposes that the text of the Talmud though fuller than that of the Sifre is not quite complete, the words **ומעשה דוד בבת שבע** being omitted out of respect for the pious king. If this assumption be correct **כתובים הראשון** stand for the Pentateuch,⁷ where the sins of Reuben and Judah are told and the Book of Samuel, where the story of David's sin is given. The woman is thus admonished to confession by the court who put before her in an elaborate way, or, as the Rabbis say, in Haggadic style, the events narrated in the earlier parts of Scripture, i. e. Genesis and Samuel.⁸ The second explanation has much in its favour, especially as it does away with a very great difficulty. The incident of David with Bath-Sheba and the confession of his sin by the pious king is certainly the most natural thing that we would expect the court to dwell upon in addressing the woman suspected of adultery. The omission of the reference to David in our texts can easily be explained, as according to the regulations laid down in Mishnah, Megillah, end, the "story of David" is not to be read in the Synagogue and still less to be translated by the Meturgeman, while the "story of Reuben" may be read, though not translated, the "story of Judah" only is permitted to be read and translated.⁹

Attention should also be called to the fact that the text of Yerushalmi as given in Midrash Haggadol, Num. 5, 19 (in

⁷ Rashi, *ad loc.*, understands **כתובים הראשון** to refer to the Pentateuch which however is very unlikely, as we certainly would expect **בתורה**, the usual term for this part of the Bible. Of course Rashi does not commit the error of making **כתובים הראשון** dependent on **שארעו** but takes it to stand for **שכתובים** which is quite possible.

⁸ The order of the Prophets is, "Joshua, Judges, Samuel" (Baba Batra 14b) and it is quite natural to describe the first and fourth books of the Bible as the first writings.

⁹ This is in accordance with the readings of the editions. See, however, *Variae Lectiones*, Megillah, 25 a, note 60. It is very likely that, according to the Mishnah, the paraphrase by the Meturgeman only was prohibited, while later this prohibition was extended to the reading too.

manuscript) has **יהודה בתמר ומעשה אמנון באחותו**. This reading¹⁰ can hardly be justified, as Amnon does not belong to the repentant sinners and it can be explained only by the assumption that the original reading was: **מעשה ראובן ... בתמר ומעשה דוד בבת שבע** as in Mishnah Megillah, end. When the reference to David was omitted the one concerning Amnon was substituted to make our Baraita agree as far as possible with the phraseology of the Mishnah. It may be mentioned in passing that the confessions of Reuben and Judah are a very favorite subject with the Tannaim and Amoraim, comp. e. g. Pesikta Buber XXV, 159a—159b, Sifre Deut. 348, Midrash Tannaim 214.

On **כתובים** as name for Pentateuch and Prophets comp. Blau, *Zur Einleitung*, p. 28sq. His explanation of the later use of the term **כתובים** = Hagiographa as an abbreviation of **שאר כתובים** is supported by the very same development of the use of **ספרי** "Sifre" from **רבי רב**; comp. RSBM on Baba Batra 124b.¹¹

The only quotation from an apocalypse in the Talmud¹² is found Sanhedrin 97b and reads: "Four thousand two hundred and ninety years after "creation" the world will become orphaned;¹³ the wars of the dragons (**תנינים**, a mythological-eschatological word!) will then take place as well as the wars of Gog and Magog and after these events the days of the Messiah, but the renewal¹⁴ of the world by God will take place after

¹⁰ Comp. Schechter in the introduction to his *Sectaries*, I, 27, note 65. The emendation **לאבות הראשונים** suggested by him is not acceptable. It is true **אבות** is sometimes applied to prominent men of biblical times (comp. Ginzberg, "*Eine Unbekannte Jüdische Sekte*", 295, note 2), but Amnon is certainly more of an infamous person than a famous one. In Yalkut ed. princeps **בכתובות** (comp. note 5) is a corruption of **בכתובים**, not of **לאבות**.

¹¹ The objections raised by Hoffmann, *Zur Einleitung*, 40, note 1, against this explanation of R. S. B. M. are not very strong, but it would lead me too far to discuss them here.

¹² Prof. Israel Levi, R. E. J. I, 108 seq. has collected a number of apocalyptic passages—but not all of them—found in the Talmud. His view, however, that they prove the composition of apocalyptic writings by the Amoraim is far from convincing.

¹³ I. e. there will be no pious and good men left; comp. Mekilta, Bo 16, 18b, and parallel passages given by Friedmann.

¹⁴ **חדש** admits two meanings, "to renew" and "to create anew", comp. Ps. 51¹² where **חדש** is = **ברא**.

seven thousand years". This passage is quoted in the Talmud from a Scroll "written in Assyrian script (= square) and in Hebrew language" which a Jewish soldier is said to have found about 300 c. E. in the archives of Rome.

The description of this apocalyptic Scroll as having been "written in Assyrian script and in Hebrew language" is very interesting. What is meant by this characterization of the apocalyptic writing is that it had the make-up of a Biblical book. Scripture defiles the hands only when written in Hebrew language and in Assyrian script (Yadaim IV, 5), and similarly the scroll of Esther used for public reading on the feast of Purim had to be written in the same way, comp. Megillah I, 8; II, 1. The claim made accordingly for the apocalyptic scroll was that it was, if not of a canonical, at least of semi-canonical character, written for the purpose of public reading and study. The question whether this claim was justified does not need to detain us since we know nothing about its merits. It is, however, very significant that as late as the fourth century such a claim could be raised for a non-canonical book.

This leads us to the very crucial question: did the Synagogue at some time or another, at the joint conference of the schools of Shammai and Hillel about 66 c. E., or later in Jabne about 120,¹⁵ take steps to prohibit the reading of the Pseudepigrapha and particularly the Apocalypses. This is not the place to discuss the difficult problems connected with the history of the Canon, but it is evident that we shall never understand the attitude of the Synagogue towards these "outside writings" as long as we do not know what the Tannaim have to say on this subject. The very learned and stimulating essay by Professor George F. Moore "The Definition of the Jewish Canon and the Repudiation of Christian Scriptures"¹⁶ represents the last word of Biblical scholarship on the final delineation of the Canon. I regret however that I cannot accept the conclusion which this distinguished scholar has reached.

The result of the thorough examination by Prof. Moore of

¹⁵ Comp. Graetz, *Kohélet* 166 seq.

¹⁶ Published in "*Essays in Modern Theology and Related Subjects*", N. Y., 1911.

the Tannaitic sources bearing upon this question may be briefly summed up as follows: The **ספרים החיצונים** the reading of which is strongly condemned¹⁷ by Rabbi Akiba, Sanhedrin X, 1 refer to the heretical, in particular to the early Christian writings. The **ספרי המירס** spoken of by Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai, Yaddaim IV, 6 in connection with the defilement of the hands and the reading of which books is permitted in Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin X, 28a owe their existence to a scribal error; **המירס** is nothing but a corruption of **המינים**. Consequently the text of Yerushalmi is to be emended to read as follows: **הקורא בספרים החיצונים כגון ספרי בן לענה וספרי המינים אבל ספרי (י) בן סירא וגו'.** The translation of this passage as given by Prof. Moore reads: "He who reads in the arch-heretical books, such as the books of Ben-Laana (Gospels)¹⁸ and the books of the heretics (Christians).

¹⁷ The words of R. Akiba are "Also he who reads in the outside books has no share in the world to come". It may not be out of place to remark that the rabbis were often in the habit of using emphatic language. That the losing of the share in the world to come is not always to be taken literally can easily be seen from the remark, Abot R. Nathan, XXXVI, 108, about the seven professions—very honorable ones—whose members are declared to forfeit their share in the world to come; comp. also, *ibid.* XXVII.

¹⁸ The reading Laana is very doubtful. The only MS. of this part of the Yerushalmi has **לענא** (comp. Ginzberg, *Yerushalmi Fragments*, 262) and this is very likely the correct reading, as Kohelet R. XII, 12, in a passage undoubtedly dependent on Yerushalmi has **תנלא** and this is much nearer to **לענא** than to **לענה** of the editions. The identification of Laana with Jesus by Prof. Moore is neither better nor worse than the half dozen other identifications of this name recorded by me in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s. v. Ben Laana. When, however, Prof. Moore, in support of his identification, points to another nickname for Jesus found in the Mishnah I must say with the Rabbis of old: "An error once entered remains." A Babylonian Amora in the second half of the third century, who very likely never in his life saw a Christian nor knew anything about Christianity had the ingenuity to find in **בן סטרא**—a sorcerer mentioned in the Tannaitic source, Tosefta Shabbat, XI, 15—a nickname for Jesus. The identification is not only without any sound basis, but hardly possible, as has been conclusively shown by Derenbourg, *Essai*, 460 seq. and especially Chajes in the Hebrew periodical, Ha-Goren, IV, 33—37. The hunt for nicknames, however, continues merrily and soberminded scholars speak seriously of Balaam, Doeg, Ahitophel, and Gehazi as being the nicknames which the Mishnah Sanhedrin, X, 1, uses for Jesus and three

But as for the books of Ben-Sira and all books that have been written since his time, he who reads in them is as one who reads in a letter". The inference which Prof. Moore draws from these premises is that the attempt authoritatively to define the Canon of the Hagiographa was dictated by the danger that threatened the Synagogue from the circulation among Jews of the Gospels and other Christian books.

Personally I am firmly convinced that there never was a time when the Synagogue had to carry on a fight against the canonicity of the Gospels,¹⁹ but, as this is rather a matter which

of his disciples. If these scholars were consistent they ought to try to identify the three kings—Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh—with three Christian emperors, since the four "private persons" mentioned and the "three kings" are said in the Mishnah to form one class of grave sinners. What a pity that there were no Christian emperors at the time of the Mishnah! Numerous legends concerning these seven sinners are given in both Talmuds in connection with the statement of the Mishnah concerning them, and these legends can by no stretch of imagination be made to apply to other persons than to those who bear these names in the Bible. They show not only how the Amoraim understood this statement of the Mishnah, but also how much the lives of these Biblical persons occupied the fancy of the Jewish people. One may therefore state with absolute certainty that the entire Talmudic-Midrashic literature does not know of any nicknames for Jesus or his disciples. I may add that גליונים = εὐαγγέλιον must not be taken as a mutilation or perversion, but is a very common form of apheresis, comp. the remark on page 128 about מירום = Homer. By the way, if Ben Laana is a nickname for Jesus why not take it as an equivalent for בן מרים, the son of Miriam? According to the Rabbis, the name Miriam denotes "bitterness" (Seder Olam R., III, and the parallel passages given by Ratner), and לענה "wormwood" is used in Hebrew to describe something very bitter. Of course I do not consider this etymology seriously. Jesus is never named in old sources otherwise than יהושע, ישו, ישוע or Jesus the son of Pantera. Origen. *C. Cels.* I, 70, shows that Pantera (= פנתריא i. e. πῆντερᾱ) is a real name and not a nickname.

¹⁹ The passage Tosefta Yadaim, III, 4, "The Gospels and the other heretical books do not defile the hands" has been frequently misunderstood. The defiling of the hands by a book being equal to our way of saying that such a book is canonical, this statement of the Tosefta was taken to mean that it needed a special ruling to declare these books as non-canonical. The truth of the matter, however, is, that the Halakah had to consider the possibility of the defilement by these books not on

can neither be proved nor disproved, I shall limit myself to an examination of the premises which led Prof. Moore to his conclusions. I fully agree with the view which finds in the Mishna Sanhedrin a statement by R. Akiba directed against Christians. The severe condemnation by Rabbi Akiba of the use of Exodus 15 26 in connection with medication is certainly directed against certain Christian healers,²⁰ as has been felt by many scholars, though they were unable to explain why just this Biblical verse was so opprobrious to the Rabbis. The answer to this question is very simple. The last three words of this verse **אני יהוה רפאך** have the same numerical value (three hundred eighty eight plus three for the three words = three hundred ninety one) as the name of Jesus (**יהושע** = three hundred ninety one). It is not unlikely that some crypto-Christians who were afraid to openly perform

account of their own merits but because of the numerous quotations from Scriptures they contain. This paragraph of the Tosefta is, as one easily sees, not a comment upon Mishnah Yad. IV, 6, where the defilement by Scripture is discussed between Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai and the Sadducees, but on Yad. III, 5, where the law is laid down that even a very small fragment of a canonical book defiles the hands. In view of this ruling the question had to be discussed what to do with those heretical writings containing copious quotations from Scriptures. The final decision was that even the most extensive quotations from Scripture lose their holy quality if embedded in an heretical writing or in a prayer book; prayers should not be written down, but recited by heart. The far fetched interpretation of **גליונים** in Tosefta as "margins" given in Shabbat 116a shows rather the acquaintance of the Babylonian Amoraim with the Gospels than their ignorance of the true meaning of **גליונים** = *εὐαγγέλιον*. They knew that there is no continuous quotation containing 85 letters from the Hebrew Bible in the Gospels, which number is the minimum of a fragment that might defile the hands. Accordingly the Amoraim found the statement concerning the Gospels, **גליונים**, given in Tosefta entirely superfluous, and solved the difficulty by explaining **גליונים** as margins. The Tosefta however either mentioned **גליונים** on account of the other heretical books with which the Gospels are ordinarily coupled together (and there very likely were heretical books that contained quotations from the Bible of more than 85 letters), or the Tosefta dates from a time when the minimum was less than 85 letters.

²⁰ The magical averruncation mentioned in Tosefta Sanhedrin, XII, 10, and Abot R. Nathan, XXVI in connection with this mode of healing is said in Mark 7 33, 8 23, John 9 6, to have been employed by Jesus.

cures "in the name of Jesus" would use this verse in which they found his name indicated. Professor Moore, however, does injustice to the Rabbis when he maintains that they had no scruples about using verses of the Bible in connection with medication. The prohibition against "healing by the words of the Torah" is given in the Babylonian as well as in the Palestinian Talmud (comp. Shebuot 15 b, Yerushalmi Shabbat VI, 8b), and the numerous magical formulas in the Talmudim, with one exception (Shabbat 67a, top), contain no Biblical verses. The very strong condemnation of the use of Exodus 15 26 cannot, however, be explained otherwise than on account of the favour this verse enjoyed among the Christian healers. But the coupling by R. Akiba of the prohibition against the outside books with that against the use of Exodus 15 26 as a charm does not indicate that both prohibitions are directed against Christians. Tosefta Sanhedrin XII, 10 and Aboth R. Nathan XXXVI, end, add another statement concerning the Canon by R. Akiba which by no stretch of imagination can be made to refer to some Christian heresy or practice. In these sources the man who sings the Song of Songs at festival gatherings—i. e. who treats this Biblical book as if it were of a secular character—is classed among those who have no share in the world to come. We know from many other places that Rabbi Akiba was the valiant champion of the canonicity of this Biblical book, but the opposition he had to combat he met among his own colleagues and friends.²¹

The meaning of **הַיְצוּנִים** in the statement of Rabbi Akiba is the crucial point in the entire discussion. I shall therefore try to establish its true meaning. The word occurs nowhere else; Mishna Megillah IV, 8 **דֶּרֶךְ הַחִיצוֹן** is in the correct reading²² while **הַיְצוּנִים** of the editions is undoubtedly due to **הַחִיצוֹנִים** in R. Akiba's famous statement. The meaning of **דֶּרֶךְ הַחִיצוֹן** is

²¹ Comp. Yadaim, III, 5.

²² This is the reading of Ms. Munich, Aruk s. v. **אוֹנְקִי**, Meïri, and R. Nissim Gerondi (*Jerusalem*, 1884) ad loc. Aruk s. v. **חֶצֶן**, agree with the editions, but this is certainly a copyist's error, since the explanation of the phrase given in this passage does not admit any other reading than that given in the first passage.

easily established if one considers it in connection with the expressions **כשורה** and **לפנים משורת הדין**. A correct action is **כשורה**, literally "according to the line"—of the law, **לפנים משורת הדין** "within the line" describes a pious action which the strict law does not directly command and accordingly **דרך החיצון** is "outside the line"—the exact regulation of the law.²³ To say with Prof. Moore that the term **חיצונים** is synonymous with **מינים**, but evidently carries a stronger reprobation, would be far from the mark, even if the reading **החיצונים** were the correct one. The covering of the phylacteries with gold²⁴ or putting them on the sleeve instead of on the bare arm is characterized as **דרך החיצונים**. Now, while these practices are not quite correct they are not at all a serious break of the Law, as pointed out by R. Nissim Gerondi in his commentary on *Al-Fasi* ad loc. and consequently, though censured as incorrect, are never said to be heretical. On the other hand, the putting of the phylacteries not on the part of the body prescribed for this practice is declared to be an outright heresy. If therefore the reading **החיצונים** in Megillah were correct it would furnish the strongest proof against taking **החיצונים** in Sanhedrin in the sense of heretics. Prof. Moore quotes Talmud Megillah 24b to the effect that the persons described as **החיצונים** in the Mishna are such as are suspected to be inoculated with heresy. The Talmud, however, offers no comment whatever on this part of the Mishnah. The words quoted from the Talmud by Prof. Moore refer to something entirely different. The Mishna *ibid.* reads: "He who says 'I refuse to step before the Tebah (perform the public service in the Synagogue) in coloured garments' is not permitted to do it in white gowns". The comment of the Talmud on this Mishnah is: Because we suspect that he is inoculated with heresy. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Instructor* II, 11, 12, as well as III, 11 likewise mentions the custom of the early Christians to dress in white, and consequently the heresy spoken of by the Talmud in

²³ Comp. Aruk, s. v. **חצון** whose words are: **לא עבר כרין וכשורה**.

²⁴ This custom reminds one of the use of chrysography for the divine names in the Holy Scrolls by the Alexandrian Jews, which was likewise censured by the Rabbis. Comp. Shabbat, 103 b, Masseket Soferim, I, 10.

this connection refers to Christianity.²⁵ Professor Moore quotes further the reading **מינות הונה תיצונה** from the Munich manuscript which he renders by "heresy and extraneous speculation". No such reading is found there, nor does **הונה** "speculation" occur anywhere else in the Rabbinic literature. The copyist of the MS. made a mistake and wrote **מינות** which word he had before him in the first clause of the Mishnah, but noticing his error he corrected it to **תיצונה**. Rabbínovicz, the author of *Variae Lectiones*, thus remarks: written **מינות** but "corrected" **הונה** to **תיצונה**. The photograph of this manuscript is before me and I find that this statement of Rabbínovicz is correct.

We may then state with certainty that there is no such word as **היצונים** "heretics" in the entire Talmudic-Midrashic literature, and that judging by the use of the singular **תיצון** the plural **היצונים** could not have been used in the sense supposed by Prof. Moore. But even granted the equation **היצונים**=**מינים**, the expression **ספרים התיצונים** "heretical books" is hardly possible in Talmudic Hebrew. We have **ספרי מינים** "heretical books", **ספרי קוסמים** "magical books",²⁶ and consequently we would expect **ספרי היצונים** the "books of the heretics" and not **ספרים התיצונים** as we have it in R. Akiba's Mishnah. It is true, the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 100b explains **ספרים התיצונים** by **ספרי מינים** "heretical books", but the Palestinian Talmud, Sanhedrin X, 28a, which is by far a safer guide in historical or linguistic matters than the Babli, quite explicitly states that Ben Sira is included among the **ספרים התיצונים** and thus clearly takes **ס' התיצונים** to mean books "outside of the Canon", though not of a heretical character. The attempt made by many scholars to reconstruct the text of Yerushalmi so as to agree with Babli is decidedly a vain effort. Before entering, however, upon the discussion of this point it is necessary to know what **ס' המירס** stand for in this passage of the Yerushalmi, as a good deal depends upon the correct understanding of this term.

Professor Moore gets rid of this inconvenient term by emending it to **ס' מינים**, but while there may be some doubt as to the

²⁵ Comp. also Goldfahn, *Monatsschrift* 1870, 174.

²⁶ Yerushalmi Maaserot, I, 51 a.

exact meaning of this obscure word,²⁷ no doubt is possible as to its genuineness. Midrash Tehillim, I, 9 in commenting upon Ps. 19 15 remarks: David prayed to God that men may not read his words as they read the books of **מירום**, but that they may read them and meditate²⁸ over them so that they receive reward for doing it as if they would study the most difficult parts of the Tora **ואל יהו קורין בהם כקורין בספרי מירום אלא יהו קורין בהם והוגין בהם ונושלין עליהן שכר כנגעים ואהלות** ²⁹ ונו'. It is evident that **מירום** is the same as **המירום** in Yaddaim IV, 6 and in our passage of the Yerushalmi and that by it the Midrash understands books of a secular nature which one may read without doing damage to one's salvation though the reading is without spiritual benefit; one "reads them, but does not meditate or ponder over them". To make David pray that the Psalms may not be read by men "like heretical books" would be the height of absurdity. A careful reading of the Mishna Yaddaim leads to the same conclusion as to the meaning of **ס' המירום**. The books which according to Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai do not defile the hands "because they are not precious" can only be secular books but not heretical ones. The description of heretical books by the leader of the Pharisees as "not precious" would be as inept as such a characterization of the Thesis of Luther by the head of the *Index Expurgatorius*.

The earliest commentary on the Mishnah composed in the ninth or tenth century by one of the Babylonian Gaonim—perhaps Saadia³⁰—takes **המירום** to be "Homer" and this is very likely the correct interpretation of this word. Of course, we

²⁷ There are numerous etymologies of this word; comp. Graetz, *Monatschrift*, 1870, 139 seq., Perles R. E. J. III, 114, Weil, *ibid.* 278, Kohut, J. Q. R. III, 546, Kohler, *ibid.* V, 415, Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 355 b. Not one of these etymologies deserves serious consideration; on the traditional explanation of **המירום** = Homer see text.

²⁸ This passage shows conclusively that **הנה** is not "read" but "study" or "meditate", comp. note 40.

²⁹ These laws form a very difficult section of the Mishnah and hence are often used to describe the most important parts of the Halakah; comp. for instance Hagigah, 14 a.

³⁰ Comp. Ginzberg, *Geonica*, 172 seq. and Epstein, *Der Gaonäische Kommentar*, 29 seq.

We shall now proceed to examine the text of the Yerushalmi. We have seen that המירס must not be amended and that by it secular literature is meant, the reading of which is permitted in contrast to that of the Book of Ben Sira which is said to belong to the prohibited books. The question is of course very puzzling how to harmonize this interdict by Rabbi Akiba³³ with the fact that, of all the Apocrypha, Ben Sira is the only one quoted by the rabbis. A great Talmudist at the end of the sixteenth century³⁴ suggested the following emendation of the Yerushalmi: (r.: ספר כגון ספרי המירס וספרי בן לענה אבל ספרי סירא וכל ספרים שנכתבו מיכן והילך הקורא בהן בקורא באיגרת. Among modern scholars it was Graetz (*Kohelet* 166) who

³⁴ R. Issachar Baer Eulenburg in his *Novellae on Sanhedrin*, 100 b.

independently proposed the same emendation which was later accepted by Perles (R. E. J. III, 116), Joel (*Blicke* I, 75) and Professor Moore. I do not think however that this emendation is acceptable. The statement of R. Joseph, Sanhedrin 100b, that one is prohibited to read the book of Ben Sira is certainly based upon a Tannaitic tradition which counted Ben Sira among the prohibited books. In other words this Babylonian Amora, celebrated for his great knowledge of Tannaitic traditions (comp. Berakot 64a, Horayyot, end) agrees with the view given in our text of the Yerushalmi and it would therefore be against all canons of criticism to emend it against such high authority for its genuineness. It is true the discussion between R. Joseph and his pupil Abbay shows that even the master was unable to explain the reason of the interdict against the reading of Ben Sira and driven into a lurch he had to admit: Were it not for the prohibition against Ben Sira by the Rabbis we would lecture on the book.³⁵ This, however, corroborates our view that Rabbi Joseph was acquainted with the Tannaitic tradition that counted Ben Sira among the ס' התיצונים and *volens volens* he had to submit to the authority of the Tannaim. He could not, of course, explain this Palestinian view which is based upon a different interpretation of ס' התיצונים from that prevailing in the Babylonian academies. The Babylonians identified ס' התיצונים with ס' מינים "heretical books" and Ben Sira could not well be described as heretical, while the Palestinian authorities correctly explain the term used by Rabbi Akiba as referring to "outside books" i. e. Apocrypha, especially those among them which were very popular, like Ben Sira.

The above quoted remark of Rabbi Joseph with regard to the use of Ben Sira in public lectures shows at the same time what is meant by the reading of the "outside books". Not the reading of the Apocrypha was prohibited by Rabbi Akiba, but their use in the Synagogues and houses of study for public service or instruction. More than twenty years ago I wrote: "Akiba protested strongly against the canonicity of certain of the Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus for instance (Sanhedrin X, 1,

³⁵ The corruption of the text in the Editions is obvious. Read with R. Meir Abulafia, *ad loc.*: להאי סיפרא הוה דרש' וגי'.

Babli *ibid.* 100b, Yerushalmi *ibid.* X, 28a) in which passages קורא is to be explained according to Kiddushin 49a and חיצונים according to its Aramaic equivalent³⁶ בריתא so that Akiba's utterance reads: "He who reads aloud in the Synagogue from books not belonging to the Canon as if they were canonical" etc. I have little to add to it, except that by reading aloud in the Synagogue I meant public study too and not liturgical recitation only. The objection raised by Prof. Moore against this interpretation of R. Akiba's statement can be easily refuted; he writes: "The principle, however, seems to have been early established that even the acknowledged Hagiographa should not be read in the Synagogue". But the very sources³⁷ quoted by him (Mishna, Shabbat XVI, 1 and Tosefta XIII, 1) show clearly that it needed a special ruling of the Rabbis to prohibit the public reading of the Hagiographa on Sabbath afternoon.³⁸ Accordingly these sources assume that but for this ordinance the reading of the Hagiographa—i. e. public study—would have been quite the thing to be expected. The interpretation of the statement of R. Akiba as given in Yerushalmi is therefore not only from the philological point of view, but also from the historical one by far preferable to that of Babli. The identification of חיצונים with מינים is, as we have seen, hardly possible and an interdict against the private reading of heretical books by R. Akiba is not very likely. Of his colleague Elisha ben Abbuyah³⁹ it is told that he was a passionate reader of heretical books. Later when he became an apostate his unwholesome reading was made responsible for his apostasy, but there is not the slightest indication that he was censured for his reading. The Palestinian Midrashim, even those of comparatively late

³⁶ On בריתא see my article in the Jewish Encyclopedia, s. v. where the origin of this term is explained differently from the traditional one. The Hebrew משנה חיצונה occurs only in late writings.

³⁷ Comp. also the passage quoted above, page 118, from Mishnah Megillah, end; the reading of the story of Amnon undoubtedly refers not to liturgical use of this section of the Bible but to its public study.

³⁸ Comp. Shabbat, 116b, where the view of Rab is given that the Mishnah refers exclusively to public reading.

³⁹ Hagigah; Elisha ben Abbuyah was a younger contemporary of R. Akibah.

origin, like the Tanhumas have still the old Palestinian tradition that the interdict against the ס' התיצונים is directed against the Apocrypha and not against "heretical books", comp. Tanhuma Buber IV, 59, Tanhuma Behaaloteka 15, Bamidbar R. XIV, 4 and Kohelet⁴⁰ R. XII, 12. The last Midrash influenced by Babli warns against taking into the house any other book than the Bible. Pesikta Rabba III, 9a is likewise partly dependent upon the Babli and hence distinguishes between the non-canonical and the ספרים התיצונים. One of the outstanding features of the later Midrashim is the harmonizing of the Palestinian with the Babylonian traditions.

By an *argumentum ex silentio* one might prove too much. We have seen that in the entire Rabbinic literature of the first six centuries of the Common Era there is not one quotation from the now extant apocalyptic literature, and an easy explanation is at hand. The Jewish schools at Jabneh and Tiberias whose literary activities resulted in the production of Talmud and Midrash deliberately ignored the writings of their opponents, the so-called apocalyptic Pharisees. But how about the many other apocryphal writings, not of an apocalyptic nature of which not the slightest trace is to be found in the Rabbinical literature? Did the Rabbis at Jabneh detect the hidden Sadduceeism of the First Book of the Maccabees and withdraw it from circulation? They were certainly not Sadducees who, two centuries later,

⁴⁰ The present text of the Midrash is corrupt as it contains a self contradictory statement. If the "taking into the house" of any other book than the Bible "brings confusion", it is absurd to say that non-Biblical books were given for "reading and not for serious study"; books that one is not to take into the house were certainly not given for reading. In Yerushalmi Sanhedrin, the source of Kohelet Rabba, the translation of להניין by "for reading" would give a satisfactory sense, as nothing is said there about not taking into the house any non-canonical books. I have elsewhere conclusively shown (comp. *Eine unbekannte Jüdische Sekte*, 70, 71; see also above note 28) that הנה is always "intensive study" or "meditation". The manuscript of the Yerushalmi in my "Yerushalmi Fragments", 262, has the correct reading להניין נתנו ליניעת וני. The Haggadic interpretation of Eccles. 12 12 takes this verse to refer to Scripture which alone is said to have been given for meditation and serious study—with the exclusion of all other writings which are not a subject for study. Targum paraphrases this verse in a very similar manner—on להג comp. Erubin, 21 b.

showed the Hebrew text of this apocryphal book to Origen and Jerome. It may be profitable to remember that in the entire Tannaitic literature only two non-Biblical books are mentioned by name: Megillat Taanit (Mishna Taanit II, 8) and Megillat Hassidim or Harissim (Sifre, Deut. 48 and Midrash Tannaim 42); the former thanks to its Halakhic contents is still extant, and the latter no longer so. The disappearance of the apocalyptic literature from among the Jews shows as little opposition on the part of the Rabbis to it as the disappearance of the Book of Judith shows any opposition of the Rabbis against this genuinely Pharisaic writing. The Synagogue at the time of the Tannaim did not use any book younger than Daniel and there is not one apocalyptic writing that antedates this Biblical book. One might add that, disregarding Ben Sira, which really enjoyed, at least for a time a semi-canonical character, it would be as difficult to prove the existence of a pre-Maccabean Apocryphon as that of a post-Maccabean Biblical book. There is therefore very little probability in the assumption that the Jewish schools that survived the destruction of Jerusalem rejected writings "which played an important part in the older religious life of Jerusalem and the dominions of Herod Antipas in the days when the Temple was yet standing and the Jewish state was still a reality".⁴¹ The Rabbis of Jabneh would never have hit upon the time of the Maccabean revolution as the end of the period of inspiration. This distinction must have been conferred upon the time of the Maccabees at a very early date. It is perhaps not superfluous to call attention to the fact that the discussion at the school of Jabneh concerning the Canon points in the direction of a rather liberal attitude towards it, by far more so, than that taken by the schools of Shammai and Hillel at the time of the Jewish state. Ecclesiastes, Esther and Song of Songs were denied admission into the Canon by these schools, while the scholars at Jabneh declared them canonical. But there is no book mentioned that was excluded at Jabneh from the Canon and there is not the least likelihood that there ever existed such a one.⁴²

⁴¹ Prof. Burkitt, "*Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*", 10.

⁴² That Ben Sira was a very popular book, no one would deny, but where are the proofs that it was considered canonical by Palestinian Jewry?

Professor Burkitt in his highly instructive lectures on "*Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*" quotes a saying by Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai which, he believes, really implies the renunciation of the apocalyptic idea, the notion that the Kingdom of God was an external state of things, which was just upon the point of being manifested and (as a corollary) that the person of insight could know something about it beforehand. This saying of Rabban Johanan reads: God revealed to Abram this world, but the world to come he did not reveal to him. In a note Professor Burkitt remarks that according to Rabbi Akiba, on the contrary, God revealed to Abram both this world and that which is to come. But, adds Professor Burkitt, Akiba unlike Johanan ben Zakkai believed that the Kingdom of God was at hand.⁴³

If this however be so, one might as well quote R. Akiba's view to prove the predilection of the Rabbis for the apocalyptic idea as that of Rabbi Johanan in proof of their opposition to it. We know for certain that at the final delineation of the Canon Rabban Johanan was no longer living, while Rabbi Akiba took a very important part in the deliberations leading to it. Accordingly we certainly would expect a much more favorable attitude towards the apocalyptic writings from the school of Jabneh than from the schools of Shammai and Hillel in the year 66. That Rabbi Akiba did not stand isolated in his expectation of the imminent manifestation of the Kingdom of God is clearly shown by the "small apocalypse" found in the Mishna Sota, end, the only one of its kind in the entire Tannaitic literature. The author or transmitter of this apocalypse was no other than "Rabbi

⁴³ Genesis R. XLIV, 22, states only that R. Johanan and R. Akiba differ as to the nature of the revelation, at the "covenant between the pieces", but there is no way of telling who holds the one view and who the other, and one may doubt whether the saying attributed to R. Johanan by Prof. Burkitt does not really belong to R. Akiba. By the way, the difference of opinion between these Tannaim is of a purely exegetical nature, based upon the different interpretation of the \aleph in Genesis 15 18. II Baruch 4 4, and IV Ezra 3 13, 14 agree with the view that the time to come was shown to Abram, while among the Amoraim both views are represented; comp. Genesis R. l. c.

Eleazar the Great",⁴⁴ the favorite disciple of Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai. But even the master himself counted upon the speedy appearance of the Messiah with such certainty that one of his ordinances regulating a certain religious ceremony had its reason in this expectation.⁴⁵

It would therefore not be true to the ascertainable facts to maintain that for the leading Rabbis in the first and the second generations after the destruction of the Temple the Messianic hopes were not as actual and real as they were for the generation living at the time of the great catastrophe or shortly before it.

A saying by Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai truly characteristic of the attitude of the Rabbis towards the apocalyptic idea is the following one; he said: "If thou hast a sapling in thy hands and thou art told: Behold, the Messiah has come, plant thy sapling and then go to meet him".⁴⁶ The Apocalyptics cut loose from life, the Rabbis were the guardians and leaders of a nation and they did not fail to see in the wild and vague visions of those dreamers a true menace to the physical and spiritual welfare of Israel.⁴⁷ Ethics is, if not entirely, at all events preeminently social ethics and the apocalyptic movement that flung itself with unrestrained imagination upon the future caring nothing for the present concerns and perils of the individual and the community was not only anti-social but also anti-ethical. If the Prophets had any successors they were not the Apocalyptics who forgot this world and with it men, but the Rabbis for whom the center of gravity of religion was not in a world beyond—important as that thought was—but in the actual life of man on earth. It is true, the ethical element was not ignored by the apocalyptic writers; with some of them it even played an important part.

⁴⁴ The reading: R. Joshua ben Hananiah—another favored pupil of R. Johanan—is not based on good authority.

⁴⁵ Comp. Rosh Hashanah, 30 a, "speedily the temple will be erected". By "speedily" is meant there, as the content shows, the very next year. Comp. also Taanit 17 a: אֲסוּר.

⁴⁶ II Abot. R. Nathan, XXX, 67. Read מִלֵּךְ instead of לֵךְ.

⁴⁷ It would be very difficult to prove the contention that the attitude of the apocalyptic authors toward the Torah was different from that taken by the Rabbis.

This, however, must not deceive us, any more than it did the great Rabbis, who clearly perceived that the apocalyptic view, which lacked touch with the vital problems of man, really endangered the moral element in the Jewish religion.

The "end" is the outstanding feature of the apocalyptic writings and one is apt to forget of what great importance the "beginning" was to these authors. Yet very likely the vagaries and fantasmagoria of the apocalypses about creation or, to use the term of the Rabbis, "the works at the beginning", were primarily responsible for the disappearance of this kind of literature from among the Jews. As early as the time of Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai we meet with the prohibition against discussing the "beginning" with more than one person and this prohibition was the death knell for a goodly number of the apocalypses. A matter not to be discussed becomes quickly a matter not to be read.⁴⁸

The demonology and angelology of the apocalypses not rarely discussed by them in connection with the story of creation were again of a nature that could not but repulse those who were not blind to the danger lurking in the attempt to turn popular fancy into a system of theology. The Rabbis and, of course, still more so the people undoubtedly believed in the existence of angels and demons. But like many other popular beliefs, they meant very little in the religious life of the people and still less in that of the Rabbis. The apocalyptic writings began to make wide use of these popular beliefs, first for purely literary reasons. In describing, for instance, an ascension to Heaven one could not well dispose of the angels or the description would have fallen flat; when God commands man can only obey, with an angel one can argue and dispute. Nor are the demons to be neglected, if one strives to achieve dramatic effects, as, for instance, the author of the book of Enoch in describing the depravity of mankind at the time of the deluge. What at the beginning was merely literary form gradually became theology, angels and demons began to be considered from a speculative point of view.

⁴⁸ Comp. Mishnah Hagigah II, 1, and Tosefta, II, 1. It is worth while noticing that Daniel is one of the very few apocalypses that does not contain cosmological speculations, and this apocalypse is the only one admitted into the canon.

The true leaders of Judaism saw the danger and therefore avoided as far as possible in their sayings and writings even the mentioning of angels and demons. It is certainly not an accident that the Mishna never speaks of angels or demons and that in the other Tannaitic sources they are very rarely referred to.

Of course, it would be an error to infer from it any disregard for angels and demons on the part of the Rabbis. But it is a far more grievous error to see in the widely developed demonology and angelology of the apocalypses the religious conceptions and sentiments of the people (*Volksfrömmigkeit*), in opposition to the teachings of the scribes (*Schriftgelehrtentum*) as found in the Tannaitic literature. Whatever the Rabbis might have been, we must not think of them as a class by themselves separated from the people; they were neither monks nor professors. They were of the people, lived with the people and worked for the people. Accordingly the most pronounced feature of the Haggadah of the Tannaim is its popular character, a great part thereof being the spoken word addressed by the Rabbis to the people. The apocalyptic writings by their fixed literary forms and their obscurities were not meant for the people, but for the initiated ones. The true mirror of the religious life of the Jews we find therefore in the homely and simple sayings and the teachings of the Rabbis and not in the literary productions of the Apocalyptic writers who wrote primarily for a "class" of men like themselves and not for the people.